

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5459

As of February 4, 2009

Title: An act relating to using multiple measures to meet high school graduation requirements.

Brief Description: Creating multiple measures to meet high school graduation requirements.

Sponsors: Senators Hobbs, Pridemore and McAuliffe.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/04/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Susan Mielke (786-7422)

Background: Starting with the class of 2008, high school students are required to meet the state standard on the tenth grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading, writing, and mathematics to receive a Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA). Students in special education who are not appropriately assessed using the WASL can earn a Certificate of Individual Achievement (CIA). Until 2013 students who do not meet the state standard in mathematics may graduate without a CAA or a CIA if the student meets the state standard on the reading and writing WASL, takes additional mathematics courses, and continues the mathematics WASL or an approved mathematics alternative assessment. In 2013 students will also be required to meet the state standard on the science WASL.

School districts must provide students with multiple opportunities to retake the high school WASL. The Legislature has authorized several objective alternative assessments for students who are unsuccessful on the high school WASL after at least one attempt. The 2008 Legislature directed the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to reduce the number of open-ended and extended response questions on the WASL in all subjects except writing and all grades except high school, effective with the 2010 administration of the test.

Summary of Bill: An additional way is created for students to graduate from high school without achieving a CAA or CIA. Beginning with the class of 2010, students can choose to complete five components:

- obtain a GPA in courses required by the State Board of Education (SBE) for high school graduation;
- obtain a GPA in courses required by the school district for high school graduation;

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- complete a High School and Beyond Plan;
- complete a culminating project; or
- obtain a score on the WASL or an approved alternative assessment.

Each of the five components will be evaluated using a four-point grading system and assigned a different percentage of weight to determine the student's weighted graduation score. SBE must establish the weighted score necessary to graduate. Additionally, SBE will establish guidelines for school regarding how to establish the point values to be assigned to each of the five components and how to calculate the weighted graduation score. The guidelines must include that students must attain a minimum of a passing grade in each of the courses required by the state or the school district, and students must take the WASL at least once.

The two GPA components, in total, have a 40 percent weight on a 100 percent scale. A student's score on the WASL or an alternative has a 40 percent weight on a 100 percent scale. The completion of the High School and Beyond Plan and the culminating project each have a 10 percent weight on a 100 percent scale.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 28, 2009.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill is a holistic approach to determining whether a student has sufficient skills to graduate from high school. It does not rely on one high stakes assessment to make that determination but looks at the breadth of information that a student's high school experience can provide. We need to remove the WASL, which is a barrier to student success. This bill will change the current punitive and stressful approach of labeling student as failures and denying them a high school diploma when they do not pass one high stakes test. Our budget shortfall gives us an opportunity to look at where the state is spending money and focus the spending on teachers and students and not on an assessment.

CON: This bill still requires students to take the WASL, which we cannot support. In effect, this bill eliminates the WASL because the student is not required to meet the state standard on the assessment, which we cannot support. This approach is confusing and complex. Despite the angst of the adults in the education system, the students have risen to the challenge and a high percentage of them are passing the reading, writing, and even the math WASL. This is a huge success and we should not turn back on the promise made in HB 1209 in 1993 for a twenty-first century education.

OTHER: If students successfully complete the multiple measures in this bill, then they should not be denied a Certificate of Academic Achievement. Clearly the EALRs are culturally biased, which makes the assessment used to assess the EALRS also culturally biased. Therefore, the assessment should not be used in any manner to determine whether a student can graduate from high school because it is unfair to our students of color.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Hobbs, prime sponsor; Juanita Doyon, Parent Empowerment Network; Bill Williams, Washington State Parent Teacher Association; Christy Perkins, Washington State Special Education Coalition.

CON: Allan Burke, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Wendy Rader-Konafalski, Washington Education Association; Veronica Cook, Shoreline Schools Special Education Teacher; Michelle Menegas, Clarkston High School Special Education Teacher; Brian Jefferies, Washington Roundtable; Lisa Macfarlane, League of Education Voters; Edie Harding, State Board of Education.

OTHER: Ben Kodama, Equitable Opportunity Caucus; Suzi Wright, Valda Gobin, Tulalip Tribe.